



**Testimony of Ann Rodwell-Lawton, Director of Education, Training, and Outreach  
Women's Center of Greater Danbury  
Appropriations Committee  
Public Hearing Re: Governor's Proposed FY 2018-2019 Budget  
Thursday, February 23, 2017**

Good afternoon Senator Osten, Senator Formica, Representative Walker, and members of the Appropriations Committee. My name is Ann Rodwell-Lawton and I am the Legislative Liaison and Director of Education, Training, and Outreach at the Women's Center of Greater Danbury. The Women's Center is the sole provider of services to victims of sexual assault in upper Fairfield and lower Litchfield county areas. In fiscal year 2016, the Women's Center provided life-changing services to over 25,972 individuals in our 13-town service area. We are one of the nine community-based member centers of the Connecticut Alliance to End Sexual Violence. All services provided are free, confidential, trauma-informed, and victim-centered. These services include individual counseling, safety planning, court advocacy, hospital advocacy, support groups, crisis intervention through two 24-hour hotlines, and educational and primary prevention programs. We serve victims in 13 towns in the Greater Danbury area including Bethel, Bridgewater, Brookfield, Danbury, Kent, New Fairfield, New Milford, Newtown, Redding, Ridgefield, Roxbury, Sherman, and Washington.

**There are difficult decisions ahead as you work to address the state budget deficit. The governor's budget recognizes the continued need for front line sexual assault crisis services and programs throughout our state. We ask that as you work to uphold the state's longstanding commitment to its residents to address sexual violence, and that you keep the level of funding for rape crisis intervention and prevention services in the governor's budget.**

Sexual assault does not discriminate. Therefore, our services are available for everyone – males, females, gender nonconforming individuals, adults and children, and individuals from all socio-economic classes. Services are also provided to secondary victims (e.g., spouses, partners, family members). In fact, 16% of our sexual assault clients are male, 29% are secondary victims, and 18% are young adults attending college. Often, these populations do not seek services due to shame, guilt, feelings of helplessness, and lack of knowledge that services are available to them.

The Women's Center's services, and the services provided from the other nine member agencies under the Alliance, are unique because we are covered under Connecticut State Statute 52-146k guaranteeing privileged communication between sexual assault counselors and victims. This confidentiality is critical for rebuilding trust with victims and allows victims to feel safe in the counseling process, allowing recovery to begin.

[www.wcogd.org](http://www.wcogd.org)

---

ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICES  
2 West Street, Danbury, CT 06810  
p: 203-731-5200 f: 203-731-5207  
[womenscenter@wcogd.org](mailto:womenscenter@wcogd.org)

SEXUAL  
ASSAULT  
HOTLINE  
203-731-5204

DOMESTIC  
VIOLENCE  
HOTLINE  
203-731-5206

WOMEN'S  
CENTER  
HELPLINE  
203-731-5200



In addition, we have seen an increase in demand for education programs in kindergarten through twelfth grade. This is the result of the implementation of a statewide mandate requiring sexual abuse prevention and awareness programs in all local and regional school districts in Connecticut. School districts are turning to the Women's Center to implement these programs because we are the local resource and the experts in having these important conversations with youth. We know that these programs are relevant and necessary as over 31% of high school students who participated in our education programs indicated that they personally know someone who has been sexually assaulted.

Funding cuts to an already stressed sexual violence service system will result in fewer victims served, including some of your constituents. Other possible impacts include reducing or eliminating community education and primary prevention activities. These activities are crucial because they aim to stop violence before it occurs. Without education and awareness programs, victims will suffer in silence, not knowing who will believe them, if they are to blame, and where to go for help and support. A proposed cut at any level is contrary to our state's commitment to address sexual violence. Funding for rape crisis programs is essential for community based sexual assault crisis programs to provide crisis intervention and advocacy services to thousands of children, adolescents, and adult victims of sexual assault in Connecticut.

Thank you for your time and consideration. Please do not hesitate to contact me with questions or concerns.

Best,  
Ann Rodwell-Lawton, M.S.W.  
Director of Education, Training, & Outreach  
Women's Center of Greater Danbury  
[Ann.rl@wcogd.org](mailto:Ann.rl@wcogd.org)  
(203)731-5200

[www.wcogd.org](http://www.wcogd.org)

---

ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICES  
2 West Street, Danbury, CT 06810  
p: 203-731-5200 f: 203-731-5207  
[womenscenter@wcogd.org](mailto:womenscenter@wcogd.org)

SEXUAL  
ASSAULT  
HOTLINE  
203-731-5204

DOMESTIC  
VIOLENCE  
HOTLINE  
203-731-5206

WOMEN'S  
CENTER  
HELPLINE  
203-731-5200